

Journal of Education and Vocational Research

Vol. 2, No. 6, pp. 197-198, Dec 2011 (ISSN 2221-2590)

The Evolution of a Corporate Brand**Book Review**

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While there is no lack of books on the history of the Tata Group, this is probably the only book that focuses mainly on 'the evolution of the Tata brand' (though it must be remembered that Morgan Witzel is more of a business historian than a brand strategist per se). Witzel is affiliated to Exeter Business School and the Winthrop Group, UK. He is also a prolific writer on areas related to business studies and management. His interest in the Tata Group is related to the growing awareness of the Tata brand in the UK markets following the successful acquisition of British brands like Tetley Tea, Corus, Jaguar and Land Rover in recent years by the Tatas. Given the growing importance of the Tatas in the UK markets, there is an increasing need for both business analysts and policy makers to develop a better understanding of what the Tata brand promise represents. Witzel therefore sets out to incorporate a brief history of the Tata Group as a prelude to analysing the main attributes of the brand. This book will be of use to both students of brand building and business history. The link between these disciplinary categories is also something that the reader might want to examine in passing since, as Ratan Tata boldly points out in this book, the Tatas have always had a good 'reputation' though not necessarily a 'brand'. A number of important measures were therefore introduced under his leadership to create a brand that the Group as a whole could leverage effectively to both enter foreign markets and 'serve' more effectively in domestic Indian markets.

Witzel sets out to explain exactly what these measures were and the strategic advantages that the group now enjoys as compared to a simpler era when its homegrown reputation for trust was both necessary and sufficient to attain and retain market leadership. There are ten chapters in this book along with separate sections on notes, bibliography, and an appendix that lists all the companies in the Tata Group including those that readers might have overlooked like Advinus, Tayo Rolls, Power links Transmission, Strategic Electronics Division, Lanka Special Steel, and The Indian Steel and Wire Products. There is also an interesting Foreword by the management strategist Ram Charan who argues that what makes the Tatas special is not just the fact that they are a successful group of companies, but rather the fact that their corporate mission 'is both societal and economic'. Maintaining this 'dual-mandate' (as the U.S. Federal Reserve might put it) for over a century is part of the unique positioning that characterizes this highly diversified group. This is also, what makes the Tata Group different from Western companies that restrict themselves more often than not to the economic perspective. Charan's main pitch for the group *vis-à-vis* Western audiences is that this sense of a dual-mandate is not reducible to occasional bouts of corporate social responsibility. It pertains rather to a more consistent and sustainable notion of how a firm – especially a highly diversified multinational – should relate to society as such; it is therefore worthy of emulation in the West since it demonstrates among other things 'that local society can develop local talent', as is evidenced by the example of Titan which both set up and successfully developed a community of workers around Hosur, Karnataka. Another interesting thing that Charan discusses pertains to the fact that the Tatas are able to address societal concerns without missing their ability to compete effectively in an increasingly global economy. Having a trustworthy brand that is recognized both at home and abroad (i.e. in local *and* global markets) then is a pre-requisite for success in the contemporary world. This achievement is synonymous with Ratan Tata's tenure as chair of Tata Sons.

The main goal of this book is to explain precisely why and how the felicitous combination of a sterling corporate reputation with imaginative brand building can create 'magic' in the markets. Whether this combination will always work as a formula to create brand equity or is a specific feature of the Tata approach to doing business that cannot be easily replicated elsewhere is a question that we can discuss endlessly. However, nonetheless, it is important to remember that this book is designed as an extended case study of a particular brand rather than as a general theory of branding. It is therefore a good idea to look for the specific attributes of the Tata brand – as Witzel does – that cluster around the notion of TRUST as a promise of *technical certainty, employee welfare, and world-class quality* in products and

services (irrespective of whether it is internal or external customers who are at stake in a given business transaction). The TATA brand however is not just a single brand, but include a number of product, service, and company-based brands that have been generated by the companies belonging to the group. Each of these individual brands has its own story that is worth narrating though Witzel does not attempt to do so here. Ambi Parameswaran (in a citation that is included in this book) helps us to understand how brand portfolios work when he points more generally that while 'individual brands fight their own battles', the task of the 'corporate brand' is to 'provide air cover'. That then is what the TATA 'blue ellipse' does so well - thereby justifying this case study. It might have been a good idea – in my estimation – to simply title this book as *The Blue Ellipse*.

What we must keep in mind then is the interplay of the 'constant' and the 'variables' in the articulation and deployment of a brand. Therefore, for instance, in this case, the constant is the corporate brand while the variables are the brands that are generated in reference to the main corporate brand. This is often indicated through the invocation of the phrase, 'a TATA enterprise', after the brand. Such a differentiated approach not only prevents the emergence of centrifugal forces in brand building, but also provides sufficient space for the continual generation of new brands. It will also ensure that the perception and behaviour of new brands is consistent with the value systems and the socio-cultural ethos of the Tatas as a group since an acute consciousness of 'community' has always been a way of life for Tata companies. It is, needless to say, important that all Tata brands should reflect this sense of concern effectively. This idea of community consciousness is best understood through the invocation of the role of the brand ambassador that all Tata leaders have had to play from the time of the founder, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, in the nineteenth century. This sense of community consciousness is what Jamsetji captured so well in a letter to his son Dorabji Tata when he gave elaborate instructions on what sort of facilities should be made available to the residents of Jamshedpur so that they *could live, work, play, and pray in peace*. It was Jamsetji's preoccupation with urban planning in his time then that set the cognitive foundations for Ratan Tata's interest in architecture since what the Tatas have consistently built around their companies are both industrial townships and lively communities.

The promise of trust then is not just in the product or the service or in how a company is perceived by the relevant stakeholders, but above all in the personality of its leadership who must 'walk the talk', and thereby convert the abstractions of moral leadership into a lived reality. The dual-mandate, which requires them to incorporate the needs of both 'society' and 'economy' into their strategic and leadership calculations, is what makes this continually possible. Tata chairs then were brand ambassadors - or rather *reputational ambassadors* - much before these terms were invented by business academics. It is at the locus of this convergence then between the demands of 'society' and the 'economy' that they have to function to remain true to Jamsetji's transformational vision of trust. This vision of trust is both a form of transactional fiduciary responsibility in business dealings and a transformational socio-economic commitment to the next generation of Tata employees and customers. It is as though each chairman of Tata Sons is acutely conscious not only of his 'predecessors' whom he must emulate ethically, but equally of his 'successors' as well for whom he must pave the way, since he is but a 'trustee' rather than the 'owner' or the main stakeholder of the business.

The most important thing that Ratan Tata is passing on to his successor then is a brand name that is very well-spoken of: it represents quite literally the ethic of what French psychoanalysts term *been-dire* (i.e. 'to speak well and to be well-spoken of'). This brand name however is not reducible to brand equity in the conventional sense, but comprises, in addition, the reputational capital and the impact of *bien-dire* as a form of interpersonal trust as well. Hence, the meticulous precision with which the Tatas have practiced succession planning - be it in the context of talent management or leadership development though this is a notion that is commonly espoused but rarely practiced in most large firms (given that it involves a fundamental existential encounter with the problem of human mortality and corporate longevity on the part of a company's leadership). The willingness to play the role of the trustee-in-waiting rather than a leader in the conventional sense (who has a need to dominate) is what characterizes the Indian aspect of the Tata approach to leadership from Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata to Ratan Naval Tata. The word that symbolizes this 'spirit of India', as a Tata historian once put it, is best termed *Indus* in the attempt to construct a mythical genealogy or evolutionary framework for Indian business leadership.